



# LIFELINK

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## Understanding the Different Responses to Traumatic Stress

If you've ever directly or indirectly experienced a shocking or life-threatening event—from a car accident to combat exposure—you may recall a few of your body's reactions. Your muscles may have tensed and you may have started breathing rapidly, preparing to protect yourself or escape to avoid harm. Or you may have felt physically unable to move or react; temporarily paralyzed. This reflexive response is known as **"fight, flight or freeze."** It is the brain's pre-programmed way of preparing the body for perceived or actual threats—or temporarily impairing its ability to react to the threat—and is a normal frontline reaction to extreme stress. Once the threat has passed, the body can naturally return to its optimal state, rebalancing functions that were briefly intensified or suppressed.

While the body can self-regulate, some reactions may linger for a short time afterward, such as feeling nervous or overly cautious when a situation reminds you of the traumatic experience. These reactions—which may *temporarily* impair behavior or function—are known as **posttraumatic stress**. In many cases, posttraumatic stress symptoms will subside naturally within a few days or weeks following the traumatic experience. Speaking with a **chaplain**, harnessing the support of friends and family, as well as maintaining a balanced diet and fitness regimen can help ease posttraumatic stress symptoms and promote recovery. Practicing **self-care** can also help build resilience after a traumatic experience. Try **journal writing** as a tool to promote calmness while expressing feelings, worries and concerns. If you have questions about your stress reactions or those of a shipmate or loved one, the **Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) Outreach Center** is a 24/7 non-clinical resource that can connect you with answers and additional support tools.

Anyone can be at risk of developing injuries and illnesses from stress. Reactions vary by individual and are influenced by several factors, from genetics and neurobiology, to available social support and positive coping skills. Some may not encounter extended or interfering symptoms after a traumatic experience. For others, these experiences (or other situations like the sudden loss of a loved one) may lead to development of more lasting and serious psychological health impacts, such as **posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. PTSD is a clinically-diagnosable stress illness where certain symptoms persist over

an extended period of time and severely interfere with daily function. Some of the symptoms of PTSD include:

- Re-living the event through flashbacks and/or nightmares, or reacting to reminders of the event (known as *re-experiencing*);
- Losing interest in previously enjoyable activities and/or avoiding things or people that may be reminders of the event (known as *avoidance*); and
- Becoming easily agitated or constantly feeling on edge (known as *arousal*).

PTSD can feel like a constant state of "fight, flight or freeze" even when there is no actual threat present. While PTSD can only be diagnosed and treated by a behavioral health provider, acknowledging your feelings and talking to someone about your experiences are important first steps toward recovery. Remember that you are not alone. By visiting [www.maketheconnection.net](http://www.maketheconnection.net), you can view candid video testimonials shared by veterans, service members and their families who have experienced traumatic stress and sought help. Make the Connection offers customized information relevant to your own experiences, helping you better understand and navigate the issues you may be facing while connecting you with resources and services near you. The **PTSD Coach** mobile app, available for **desktop**, **Apple** and **Android** devices, also provides personalized feedback while suggesting coping skills, sources of support and professional treatment options.

The more you are able to talk about your experiences, the less power the intrusive memories will have over you. Seeking the help of a qualified professional can help you understand your symptoms, build new coping skills and return to living a productive and meaningful life.



For more info, visit [www.MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net).



## Lifelink Spotlight

### The Many Roles of the Navy Chaplain



ICYMI (“in case you missed it”), last month **Navy Medicine Live** published a blog post highlighting the many ways the Navy Chaplain Corps promotes readiness and resilience among Sailors and families. **“Navy Chaplains Team with Navy Medicine Mental Health for Care and Compassion”** described how the pastoral care team at Naval Hospital Bremerton (NHB) engages with staff members and beneficiaries at the command, offering support to help them navigate life’s challenges—whether seeking spiritual guidance or someone to listen.

The blog post underscores the role of empathy as one of the most important tools in a chaplain’s toolbox when it comes to supporting the mental health of those who seek their counsel. “Empathy means to feel what another is feeling. When true empathy happens between two people, it can change lives,” said NHB Command Chaplain Cmdr. Bruce Crouterfield. “There are moments when a person is liberated from some burden, only because there was someone who was willing to listen to their story...” he continued in his explanation of empathy and compassion.

Chaplains often work alongside mental health providers at NHB, providing insight and a sense of comfort outside of clinical care while upholding their unique confidentiality. They also support the command’s Sexual Assault Response Program (SARP), providing confidential support to victims during and beyond the recovery process. “Face-to-face or by social media, a chaplain can extend complete and total confidentiality to a person,” said Lt. Shawn Redmon, a NHB chaplain.

Reminding shipmates that it’s okay to speak up when you’re down is one of the many ways to be there for *Every Sailor, Every Day*. Learning more about confidential communication to Navy chaplains can help you help your shipmates—or you—navigate stress safely and build resilience. Click [here](#) to view and download fact sheets on chaplain confidentiality to post in your command.

## Plan of the Week Notes New!

*Lifelink will now feature Plan of the Week notes supporting stress navigation, suicide prevention and Total Sailor Fitness topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign and other DoD organizations during the current month. If you would like to request additional notes or provide feedback, please email [suicideprevention@navy.mil](mailto:suicideprevention@navy.mil).*

1. Stress injuries are the result of severe or prolonged exposure to stress. The Orange Zone of the Stress Continuum Model can help identify symptoms and behaviors associated with stress injuries, which if left untreated, can lead to psychological health illnesses including posttraumatic stress disorder. To learn about these symptoms and how to promote recovery, visit the Operational Stress Control blog at <https://navstress.wordpress.com/2016/04/18/stress-awareness-month-know-your-zone>.
2. Did you know that men are 24% less likely than women to have visited a doctor within the past year? Making healthy choices includes consulting health professionals and becoming educated on what preventive measures are most important for your health. Check out Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center’s latest infographic, “Men’s Health: Investing in the Future is not a Game,” for men’s health tips to promote physical, psychological, emotional and behavioral well-being: <http://go.usa.gov/cSdwX>.
3. Resilience refers to our capacity to withstand, recover, grow and adapt in the face of stressors and changing demands. Predicting challenges, maintaining a sense of control, strengthening relationships, fostering trust and finding meaning are critical to building resilience and navigating stress. Check out the *Every Sailor, Every Day* campaign’s latest Principles of Resilience infographic series here: <http://go.usa.gov/cutxG>.
4. Starting a conversation about stress and the value of seeking help builds trust between shipmates and leaders—1 Small ACT to support *Every Sailor, Every Day*. Share your ideas for supporting your shipmates by emailing your Small ACT Selfie to [suicideprevention@navy.mil](mailto:suicideprevention@navy.mil). Signs and more information are available here: <http://go.usa.gov/cSMYS>.
5. Seeking help is a sign of strength. The Military Crisis Line provides confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-TALK (press 1), text 838255 or visit [www.militarycrisisline.net](http://www.militarycrisisline.net) to get the help you need.

## New Principles of Resilience Infographics

The *Every Sailor, Every Day* campaign has released six new infographics illustrating the Principles of Resilience and how to apply them when navigating stress. Each graphic can be downloaded from the **Suicide Prevention** and **Operational Stress Control** websites for use on social media or for printing and posting at your command.

## News and Resources

Tips for Discussing Suicide  
Data and Statistics  
[Navy Suicide Prevention](#)

Military Suicides: Most  
Attempts Come Before Soldiers  
Ever See Combat  
[NBC News](#)

Personalize your Individual  
Stress Navigation Plan Today  
[Navy Suicide Prevention](#)

Physically Fit and Mentally  
Strong  
[Guard Your Health](#)

Moving in Together? Talk  
Finances  
[HPRC](#)

Clinician's Corner: Mental  
Health Providers Need Self  
Care, Help Too  
[DCoE](#)

Guidance for Reducing Access  
to Lethal Means through  
Voluntary Storage of Privately-  
Owned Firearms  
[NAVADMIN](#)

Your Military Child's Mental  
Health  
[HPRC](#)

DoD Program Offers  
Transitioning Service Members  
Experience with Civilian  
Companies  
[Navy.mil](#)

Skin Deep  
[Stennis 74](#)

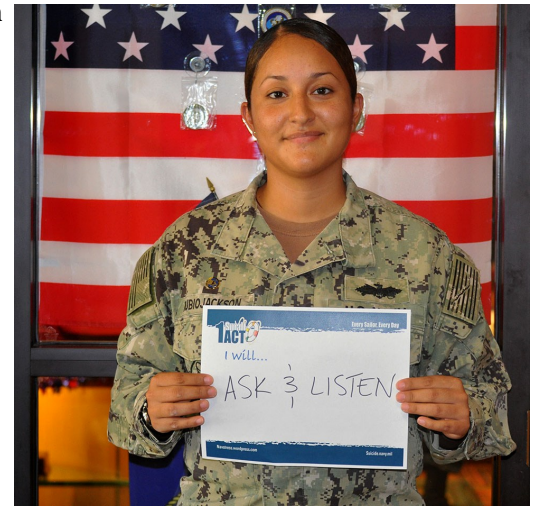
Commanding Officer's Suicide  
Prevention Program Handbook  
[Issuu](#)

Current and  
Upcoming Events  
**PTSD Awareness Month,**  
**Men's Health Month**  
June

**SPC Training Webinars**  
June 23, 1600 CST  
July 12, 1800 CST  
[Register Here](#)

## 3 Small ACTs to Support Your Shipmate's PCS Move

Summer is peak Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move season. While this transition leads to an exciting new chapter, it can also lead to disruption in daily routines and separation from one's social and support networks. The likelihood of making a bad or irrational decisions is higher during transition periods, so identifying resources early is vital to keeping a shipmate healthy and mission-ready. Building resilience and preventing suicide require each of us to be actively engaged and communicate with each other. Here are three Small ACTs you can do to help your shipmates thrive through life's unpredictable moments, not just survive:



1. **Get involved.** You may not know much about your shipmate, but you can make a difference. Even though your buddy may casually dismiss any problems, take a moment to ask how he or she is doing and actively listen. If there is any indication that other issues are at hand (relationship strain, financial worries, apprehension about career changes, feelings of hopelessness, etc.), don't be afraid to reach out and offer support. Encourage him or her to speak with someone like a chaplain or trusted leader before the situation becomes overwhelming. Getting assistance early is vital to ensuring that stressors don't turn into crises, especially when a Sailor is starting a new chapter in life.
2. **Don't hesitate to reach out to others to "connect the dots."** While a shipmate may seem to have it all under control, it's important to remain vigilant for even the smallest signal that something isn't right, particularly as a buddy is leaving a familiar environment. Crises are not always obvious. If you notice anything out of the norm—such as changes in attitude or behaviors—break the silence and speak with others who know him or her well (a unit leader, roommate, family member or friend). They may have noticed the same cues or observed some that you weren't aware of. Be the first to step up and start the conversation. By actively communicating, you're helping to "connect the dots" and facilitate the intervention process if a potentially serious situation is evolving.
3. **Remind your shipmate that he or she is still a part of the team.** Social connectedness, unit cohesion and purpose strengthen resilience and serve as protective factors during stressful times. Though a shipmate may be detaching from your command for any reason, let him or her know that you're still there for support and that you care about his/her well-being. Be sure that you exchange updated contact information, ask about his or her upcoming plans (travel dates, pit stops, arrival dates, etc.) and check in often. Since your shipmate will be out of your line of sight, it's important to ensure that key players stay in communication so that he or she doesn't lose the protection that a sense of community can provide. When Sailors feel as though they're outside of their network of peers or colleagues—their "inner circle"—it can have a detrimental effect on their sense of purpose and belonging. No matter where your shipmate is, they should never feel alone.

Communication is an ongoing process, built upon trust that is established over time. Stay engaged with your shipmates on a daily basis—whether they're at the command, on liberty leave or in any transition phase. Always encourage **seeking help** for stressors, no matter how big or small. Through Small ACTs of kindness, you can be there for *every Sailor, every day*.

*Transferring to a new behavioral health provider or health care system due to a transition (PCS, return from deployment, separation or retirement)? **inTransition** offers coaches who can connect service members with resources in their new community, provide stress navigation tools and offer continuous support during the process. For more information, call 800-424-7877 or visit [intransition.dcoe.mil](#).*